



U.S. EMBASSY - BAGHDAD

## 2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

### -PRTs Indulge in Kebab Diplomacy in Iraq-

By Barry Greenberg and  
Jim Fisher-Thompson  
Special Correspondents

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**Muthanna Province** - Forty local farmers and sheikhs from Iraq's southern-most province recently joined the Muthanna Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) and its military team members over a traditional Iraqi lunch to discuss agricultural needs of the community.

The April 14 meeting, hosted by the PRT, took place in a mudhif or traditional Iraqi guest house adjacent to the 82nd Airborne's Combat Outpost (COP) 6 facility along Main Supply Route Tampa.



PRT agricultural adviser  
Dr. Indu Chandra Ram meets with  
farmers in Muthanna Province. On his  
left is Mohammed Maki, a PRT staff member.

The Muthanna PRT and the 82nd Airborne worked in tandem to construct the traditional reed facility as a place where the PRT could host local residents with a nod to local tradition. In this case, representatives of nine nearby villages accepted the invitation of the PRT's Senior Agricultural Policy Advisor, Dr. Indu Chandra Ram, to discuss pressing needs in their respective communities.

The Iraqi guests identified irrigation as their most pressing priority focusing on both the repair of existing irrigation facilities and the expansion of the current network. The farmers also described their great need for improved access to quality seed and fertilizer.

After a hearty lunch of beef kebab, grilled vegetable, and samoon (flat bread), the PRT identified eight new projects for the region. Six of the projects would support the rehabilitation of pumping stations to increase areas under irrigation, and the remaining two projects would be multi-sectoral to include land development, irrigation, livestock, veterinary services, and the introduction of new crops.

Most importantly, the farmers have agreed to contribute 25% of project costs themselves. This is the first time that local farmers have agreed to share project costs. According to Dr. Ram, "This is the basis of sustainable development because ownership comes from their financial stake."

Dr. Ram also highlighted the comprehensive nature of the agricultural partnerships that touch on a cross-section of PRT development priorities. "They cover nearly every sector of our reconstruction efforts," noted Dr. Ram, "including security, employment, and agricultural development." Additionally, support for the farming sector promotes a revitalization of agricultural cooperatives in Muthanna, "the backbone of Iraqi agriculture in the past" according to Dr. Ram, and a building block of civil society in rural Muthanna province.



During the discussions, PRT Muthanna also invited representatives of a Muthanna-based non-governmental organization, the Iraqi Reconstruction Institute (IRI), to listen to the concerns of the farmers.

Looking ahead, Dr. Ram will invite the Agricultural Desk Officer from U.S. Embassy Baghdad, Mr. James Conley, plus an expert from U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), to Muthanna Province in May to continue this dialogue. The PRT hopes to conduct similar meetings on a monthly basis.

In 2006, USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) placed its first advisors on PRTs in Iraq. They now number 20 and work on many of the 31 teams operating in all 18 of Iraq's provinces. Another 15 advisers will join the PRTs in 2008.

Workshops have also been sponsored by USDA for more than 200 Iraqis in the areas of: Dry land/crop soil management; irrigation; beekeeping; horticulture and dairy farming. Thirty-six small grants worth \$222,000 were awarded to Iraqi farmers and 20 more training sessions are planned before September 2008.

In order to expand linkages between Iraq's agricultural sector with the outside, USDA organized an innovative program of exchanges, research sharing and teaching between five U.S. universities and six in Iraq.

In collaboration with USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and Colorado State University, FAS provides technical assistance to strengthen Iraq's animal health and disease control programs. In October 2007, FAS sponsored a one-week planning session with 16 Iraqi government and private sector representatives to develop a national animal health program in line with international standards.

The U.S. Department of State has also provided FAS with \$7.8 million to undertake the implementation of the Iraq Agricultural Extension Revitalization (IAER) project in collaboration with the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES), which is responsible for monitoring the execution of the IAER project by a consortium of U.S. land-grant universities. The project is meant to help Iraqis restore, expand, and sustain a private-sector driven agricultural sector.

From March 2007 through February 2008, IAER conducted 12 extension seminars including field demonstrations for 270 extension personnel of the Ministry of Agriculture and Iraqi university faculty. Thirteen training sessions for 500 more Iraqis will be conducted by September 30, 2008.

Since 2003 the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has also operated agricultural programs in Iraq resulting in:

- training for 12,600 farmers, officials and university staff;
- the rehabilitation of 780,000 acres of irrigation systems while reflooding marshlands in southern Iraq;
- the repair of 4,865 tractors with 216 mechanics trained; and
- the rehabilitation of 68 veterinary clinics that serve 5.7 million animals.

Complementing USAID's programs is a new effort called Inma, meaning growth in Arabic. The \$343 million, three-year project's aim is to support the development of agribusinesses and agricultural markets in order to improve farmer's incomes while energizing what is Iraq's single largest source of employment.

It will work in close cooperation with PRTs to increase ties between farmers, agribusinesses, financial services, and domestic and international markets through the use of technical advisors working with national and local government agencies.

The goal of these program, according to the USAID website is "to revive a dynamic, market-driven agricultural sector that will strengthen private business, increase income and employment opportunities, and help meet the food requirements of the Iraqi people."